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ABSTRACT

Teachers in inner city schools today are usually unprepared for dealing effectively with a mobile, rapidly changing, culturally varied population. A program to provide such training, based upon the concept of staff self help through collegial supervision, was implemented in the Francis M. Leahy Elementary School in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Over a 5-month period, twenty-six 2-hour supervision cycles were conducted, with teams of six teachers each supervising willing colleagues. The principal and the program designer/consultant were on all teams, with the consultant demonstrating the techniques of collegial supervision while acting as supervision team leader. The cycles, which included conferences as well as classroom observations, provided opportunities for individuals to share their strengths and insights with others in a trusting, non-threatening fashion. As the participants became more confident, the consultant gradually phased himself out, leaving behind an ongoing program where teachers continue to supervise each other in teams and individually, and where the principal, as a result of his involvement in almost every supervisory cycle, is the recognized and respected supervision leader/instructional leader/inservice director. Results indicate that a school staff can be successful in providing ongoing self revitalization. (CMG)

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SELF-HELP FOR TEACHERS: COLLEGIAL SUPERVISION IN AN URBAN SCHOOL

by A. Peter Mattaliano

ABSTRACT

This article gives an account of a staff development process designed to improve the quality of classroom instruction and the school climate of the urban school. The program has recently been installed by the author in Leahy Elementary School in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Not only the principal, but teachers help teachers, through a form of collegial supervision in which individuals share their own particular strengths and insights with others in a trusting, non-threatening fashion. Staff members learned these techniques over a period of five months, this consultant spending a total of fifteen days in the school.

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SELF-HELP FOR TEACHERS: COLLEGIAL SUPERVISION IN AN URBAN SCHOOL

by A. Peter Mattaliano

Now, more than ever, teachers in inner city schools need help and support if they are to accomplish the difficult job of uplifting the quality and outcomes of school experience for inner city youngsters. Most long-term teachers in urban schools received their training in teacher education programs designed to prepare them to deal with the typical youngster of twenty or more years ago. Today's inner city child has far different needs, causing most teachers to acknowledge the necessity for ongoing instructional support services to help them successfully meet the challenges of today's urban classroom. Such support is presently not forthcoming in most schools, since effective methods for bringing about instructional improvement are either unknown, unavailable or unrecognized, while at the same time any support program with more than minimal cost is quickly eliminated from consideration because of the severe dollar shortage in school budgets.

Are schoolwide instructional programs of high effectiveness and low cost available and functioning at present? The author believes there are at least a few in existence. One such program, based upon the concept of staff self-help through collegial supervision, is presently operating in a school in Lawrence, Massachusetts.

The Francis M. Leahy Elementary School in Lawrence, Massachusetts, is a representative inner city school with a student

population of approximately six hundred. The building is sixty years old, reflecting the educational and architectural philosophies of the 1920s. As in many cities across the nation, the ethnic and socio-economic makeup of the community have rapidly and dramatically changed in the last decade mainly due to the influx of Hispanic and other minority families, most of whom have low incomes. What makes the school very different from other urban schools is its internal collegial-support system through which staff members provide instructional help for each other. This self-help system, based upon the supervision of teachers by other teachers in the school, has been implemented in the past five months through the combined efforts of the superintendent, central office staff development personnel, the principal, school staff members, the University of Massachusetts, and this consultant.

The need for such a program became evident to the principal and teachers of Leahy, who, in the past, dealt with a stable, lower-middle class population, and who were now asked to serve a mobile, rapidly changing, culturally-varied community population. As one staff member put it, "None of us have had any teacher training which prepared us to meet the needs of the children we now teach". That teacher's statement captures the essence of today's urban school problem: How do we help the teachers we have now to work effectively with a different clientele group than they were trained to deal with?

Many schools and/or districts, being quite unprepared to answer this question, allow or unwittingly encourage deterioration into a leaderless, every-man-for-himself withdrawal/retreat, further disenfranchising their already improverished clients.

Fortunately, the cohesiveness and professionalism of the Leahy leadership and staff resulted in open acknowledgement of the need for inservice support, and a serious search for a model of support which would effectively help teachers meet the challenges of working with the new clients they were being entrusted to educate.

Choice of Program

As school people are well aware, any program which is to be seriously considered must be delivered within certain limitations that reflect today's economic and social climate. The variables in this situation called for an inservice model with the following guidelines:

1. Cost must be minimal, since this basically resource-poor community (in the Proposition 2½ state) could afford to pay very little for my services.
2. The principal (the only professional in the school without classroom duties) must be the key figure in providing continuing instructional leadership when my brief consulting role is concluded. Ron Edmunds, researcher on the characteristics of effective schools, believes that principals must demonstrate strong leadership through both management and instructional skills if the school is to be effective (Edmonds, 1979).
3. Each teacher must assume shared responsibility for the help and support of colleagues, since a) it is physically impossible for the principal to provide all of the needed assistance, and b) teachers can learn a great deal from each other. Edmonds feels that the most

important factor of the effective school climate is the accepted responsibility of all personnel in the school to be instructionally effective with every pupil in the school (Edmonds, 1979).

4. The help given, in order to be effective, must be a) individualized, b) non-threatening, and c) job-embedded (ASCD, 1981).

My choice was clinical supervision as the basis for a recommended model for implementation, since it appeared to provide a creative blend of all four of the aforementioned guidelines. The proposal was duly approved by all concerned parties. What remained were the problems of the funding and logistics necessary to have an entire elementary school staff of 31 classroom and 12 special services teachers involved in a staff development program of collegial supervision involving one day per week for five months.

Logistics

The funds needed amounted to the cost of my services for fifteen days. The logistic need constituted freeing involved teachers for participation in supervision cycles (actual supervisory experiences: explained later in this article) on the average of once every two weeks for two hours within the regular school day.

The needed monetary resources were provided by collaborative action of the Superintendent of Schools of the Lawrence Public Schools and the School of Education of the University of Massachusetts. On one hand, the university sponsored a three-credit course entitled, Principles of Supervision, through which a dozen

teachers and the principal became involved, while on the other hand, the superintendent secured state grant money which helped provide an inservice program for another dozen staff members.

Staff Involvment

The program began in September with four supervision teams of six members each supervising willing colleagues. The teams were of randomly mixed composition: classroom teachers of different grade levels, bi-lingual teachers, special education teachers, and Chapter One teachers. The principal and the consultant were on all four teams, with the consultant demonstrating the techniques of collegial supervision while performing as supervision team leader for the first three cycles experienced by each of the four teams. As teachers volunteered to teach lessons for the supervision teams to supervise, most of them expressed their enjoyment and detailed their professional gain from the experience. Many of them added to the impetus of the program by telling colleagues informally about their positive experiences, and/or by requesting an experience as a supervision team member.

In Leahy Elementary School, every Tuesday was 'cycle day'. Sometimes the usual and unusual problems of life in an urban school (any school?) entered the picture. My admiration for the members of the staff grew as the weeks passed. They continually showed the spirit, the drive, the <u>pride</u>, not to let unexpected or untoward events interfere with their professional activities. Here, as an example, is what happened one cold morning in November:

> I arrived at Leahy Elementary School at 8:10 AM and walked through a sunny but

chilly schoolyard alive with youngsters playing and waiting for school to begin. I tried the door. Locked! I waited outside, chilled, with a few students close by on the steps. A mother and daughter arrived and tried the doors. They are still locked. The mother said to her daughter, "Leslie, I know you like her and you'd like me to meet her, but I have to go to work. I promise you I'll meet her and talk to her. After all it's only your second day in this school! I'll catch her tomorrow or the next day. I have to go. You know how my boss is! Find a girl you know from yesterday and stay with her for now!" Leslie answered "Alrite, Ma. Don't worry! She's just so nice that I'd like you to talk to her. She made me feel that she wanted me even though she had to find another chair for me. You go ahead to work. I'll be O.K." They kissed goodbye.

In a few minutes the custodian unlocked the door. "Sorry to keep you waiting out in the cold, but we had a break-in last night and things are a little upset", he said. I thanked him and proceeded to the principal's office where our cycles were scheduled to begin. The principal, Mr. Twomey, greeted me and said we would proceed as usual, but that we would have to use Room 203 instead of his office as previously planned. We talked briefly about the break-in. Teachers desks had been forced open and the contents dumped, but very little had been taken (teachers are constantly reminded not to leave money in desks overnight). I suggested that we postpone today's cycles. He responded, "Oh no! We don't have to do that! We will go on as usual, except that for the morning cycle I will be playing policeman, but I will be on the P.M. cycle supervision team as usual."

I walked slowly up the stairs to Room 203 and I immediately saw the open desk with contents scattered in the vicinity. I thought, "Julie's room. I hope she's not too upset when she sees this!" [I had done cycles with this teacher and had been impressed by her caring attitude, her genuinness and her skill.] She came in with the knowledge of what had happened, having been informed as she came into the building. She smiled. I felt like a fifth wheel! She said, "I've been anxiously awaiting today's cycle. Did you have coffee? I assured her that I had, and she and a helpful pupil proceeded to put the desk and its contents in order. I blurted out, "Gee, what a shame!".

She said, "Yes, but we'll be ready for business as usual. Let's see! Who are we observing today?"

I told her. She said, "Make sure you keep your coat with you. It looks like we won't have much heat today. Usually it's up by this time. It's a bad sign when it isn't" She was right. We kept our coats on all day.

Faculty Feedback

Over the five month period, a total of twenty six supervision cycles were conducted. Most of the twenty four teachers in the program experienced at least five cycles as supervision team members. Participants felt that learning these techniques provided, and will continue to provide on a permanent basis, the growth and support needed in every area of staff concern. The most valuable aspects of the program, according to participants:

a. seeing other teachers teach

b. learning the supervision and instructional analysis skills from the consultant

c. being helped to see their own teaching patterns and their relationship to reaching classroom objectives

d. receiving gratification for one's genuine strengths from colleagues

e. the trusting, non-threatening relationships developed and their positive, cohesive effect on staff morale

f. the individualized help received resulting in individual growth

g. the principal as evaluator: since he is recognized as the instructional leader, teachers feel he is the logical, legitimate evaluator.

School Ownership of the Program

As teachers became more confident about their supervisory skills, the consultant turned over the supervision team leadership to team members so that they might assume the lead role in the supervision conference (with the consultant and the other team members still providing data and guidance). The principal, having been involved in virtually every supervision cycle, became an experienced and highly proficient supervisor, making it possible for me, the only outsider in the situation, to gradually phase myself out. He remains as the recognized and respected supervision leader/instructional leader/inservice director of his building.

The teachers of Leahy Elementary School are now supervising each other in teams and individually. As teachers, their normal responsibility is: plan, teach, supervise. They have discovered that another person's perception of one's work can indeed provide the help and support one needs. As one teacher said, "You can size up someone else in an instant, but you need help to see yourself".

This collegial form of supervision deals not only with the usual data-gathering aspects of observation, but with the other important ingredient necessary for instructional improvement to take place: the relationship between the teacher and the supervisor over the data. The author is aware of many models of observation and supervision. All of them deal with gathering data in the classroom. To my knowledge, only clinical supervision also deals with developing and maintaining a trusting, nonthreatening relationship between the supervisor and the teacher.

Some Frequently Asked Questions and
My Answers to Them:

Q. What is the relationship of supervision and evaluation?

A. Teachers feel they were hired to instruct pupils. They want to be evaluated mainly on the quality of their instruction. They are frustrated and upset when they are evaluated by check list (five minutes) observation, by appearances (someone passing in the hall), or by politics or personality. Most teachers characterize the supervision they have experienced as dull, unhelpful, threatening, or a waste of time. (Blumberg, 1974, p. 5). The teachers in Leahy feel that the ideal person to evaluate them is their instructional/supervisory leader, the principal, whom, they feel, knows the strengths and weaknesses of their instructional work the best.

Q. Why does the supervision training program take one day a week for five months?

A. Instruction is complex. To help people learn to analyze instruction and then to communicate in an effective, trust-building, non-threatening way with others is a complex, difficult undertaking. I haven't as yet found a quicker or simpler way.

Q. What skills must be learned by staff members?

A. Instructional analysis skills, data gathering skills, pattern recognition and analysis skills, and positive supervision skills (presenting data to the teacher in a comprehensible and non-threatening fashion).

Q. How do you get teachers to volunteer to go through a supervision cycle?

A. We ask teachers in the program to ask a teacher who is a friend and with whom they already have a trusting relationship. Most people have someone they can ask. The person asked knows that the trusted colleague asking them is not going to cause them embarrassment or unpleasantness. Here is what the prospective teacher is told:

a. The Supervision Team will be concentrating on learning new supervisory techniques more than on the teacher's teaching per se.
b. The goals of this supervision include a pleasant and enriching experience for the teacher.
c. He/she should teach as normal a lesson as possible.
d. The teacher is invited to participate in the critique of the supervisor's performance.

Q. What is the typical supervision cycle schedule?

A. Here it is:

Typical Supervision Training Cycle SCHEDULE

	SUPERVISION TEAM	TEACHER
AM Cycle		
9:00 - 9:10	Pre-Obs Conf	9:00 - 9:10
9:10 - 9:40	Observation of Lesson . . .	9:10 - 9:40
9:40 - 10:00	Strategy Session	teacher not present
10:00 - 10:25	Supervisory Conf	10:00 - 10:25
10:25 - 10:30	Post Cycle Conf (Optional)	10:25 - 10:30
	OR:	
PM Cycle		
1:00 - 1:10	Pre-Obs Conf	1:00 - 1:10
1:10 - 1:40	Observation of Lesson . . .	1:10 - 1:40
1:40 - 2:00	Strategy Session	teacher not present
2:00 - 2:25	Supervisory Conf	2:00 - 2:25
2:25 - 2:30	Post Cycle Conf (Optional)	2:25 - 2:30

Q. What extra personnel was needed to free up teachers for the two-hour supervision cycles?

A. None. Only the consultant was extra. Coverage was accomplished by a combination of these factors:

a) use of aides

b) combining groups for large group instruction

c) strategic planning of art, music, phys ed, etc. classes

d) skillful logistic planning by the principal

e) teachers gave a lot of extra time and energy to cover students while colleagues were involved in cycles. Some of the teachers noted that, upon occasion, the time spent away from their classrooms (2 hours every other week) caused some disruption of their classroom schedules, but they agreed that, in the long run, the professional gains made more than justified necessary retrenchment efforts: *

By these formal and informal means, teachers were freed up from 8:30 to 10:30 or 11:00 to 1:00 without the use of paid substitutes. I have found that if a staff wants something to happen, it happens!

Q. How can the principal of an elementary school commit a full day a week to supervision?

A. It is a matter of priorities. A principal shows what he/she values by what he/she does. Furthermore, the principal is the most important factor in a school, and what he/she encourages, happens. What he/she ignores or discourages does not happen. Speaking from personal experience as a consultant and as a former principal, I would not advise attempting this kind of a program in any school where the principal is not behind it one hundred percent! Principals are immensely busy these days with all kinds of non-instructional

* AUTHOR'S NOTE: Longer-range planning by the consultant and/or some additional resources (for substitutes) might alleviate or eliminate this problem.

responsibilities and with almost no help. The principal of Leahy is no exception. He managed, however, without additional assistance, to miss only one of the twenty six cycles, and that was due to an overnight break-in which resulted in a request from police for two hours of his time. It is my belief that any principal who says he/she is too busy doesn't value instruction enough.

Postscript

Leahy Elementary School is living proof that a school staff can provide ongoing revitalization for itself. It is also obvious that present day budget restraints mean that a school staff must accept the basic responsibility for renewing itself. One way to bring this about, as has been done at Leahy, is for staff members to learn the skills of clinical supervision and to assume ongoing responsibility for not only planning and teaching, but for collegial supervision as well.

The cultural deprivation of many inner city youngsters can be a daily challenge to the courage, committment and skill of the classroom teacher. If the necessary support and recognition are not forthcoming, the teacher (very often a good teacher) may succumb to the anxiety, frustration, boredom or burnout that often is induced by the isolation from one's colleagues which is so prevalent in America's schools. We can do a great deal for each other once we learn how to develop trusting, non-threatening supervisory relationships with each other.

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